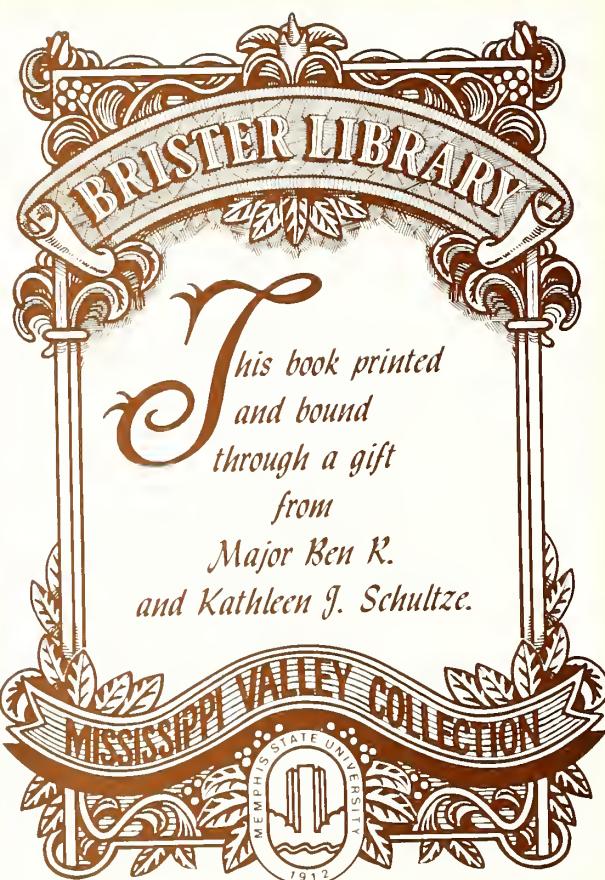


LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS  
INTERVIEWS WITH  
ADOLPH FISHER, LEOLA FISHER, AND LILLY LOCKRIDGE

BY - MICHAEL FREEMAN  
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE  
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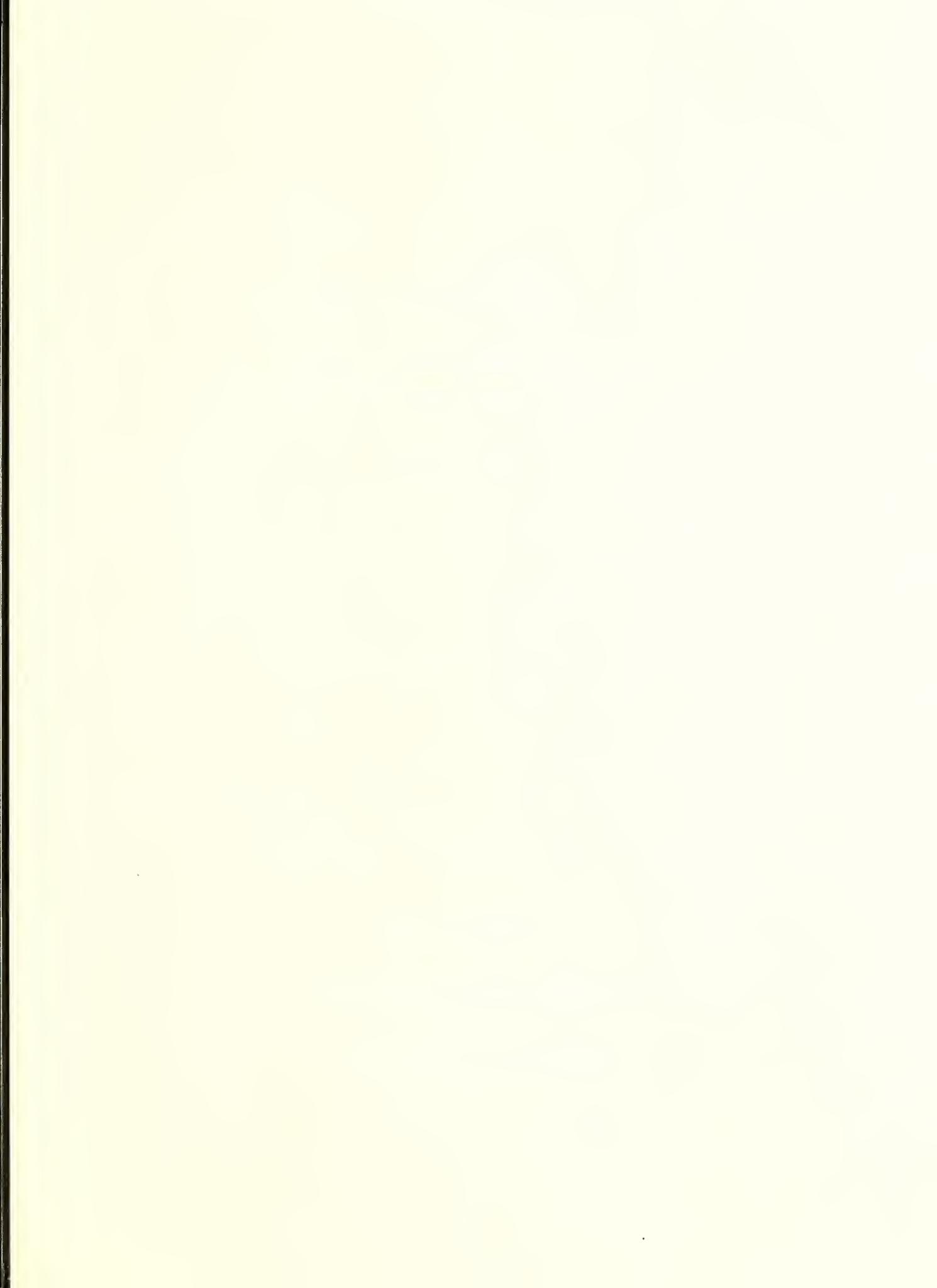
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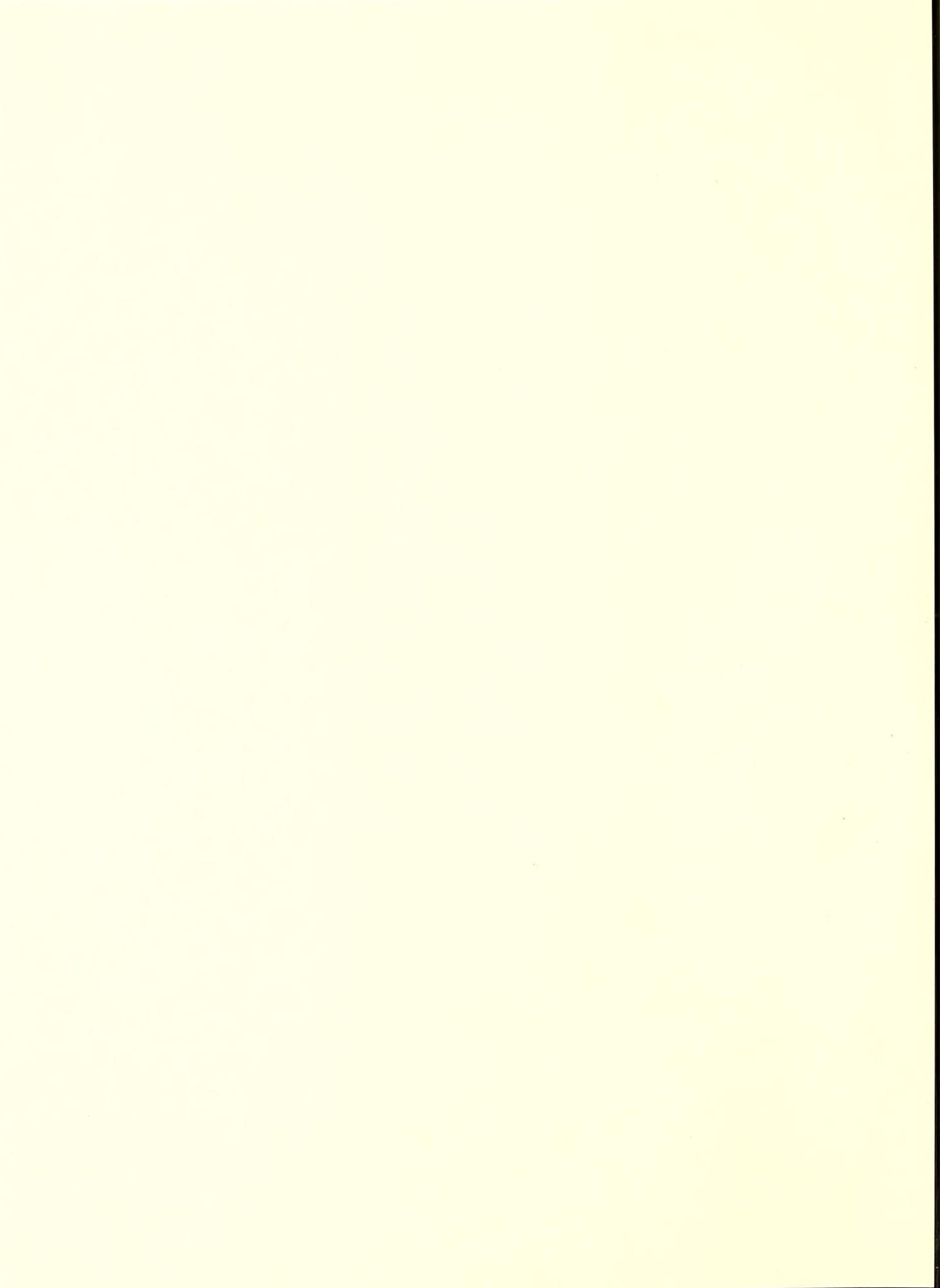
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LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS

INTERVIEW WITH ADOLPH FISHER,  
LEOLA FISHER, AND LILLY LOCKRIDGE

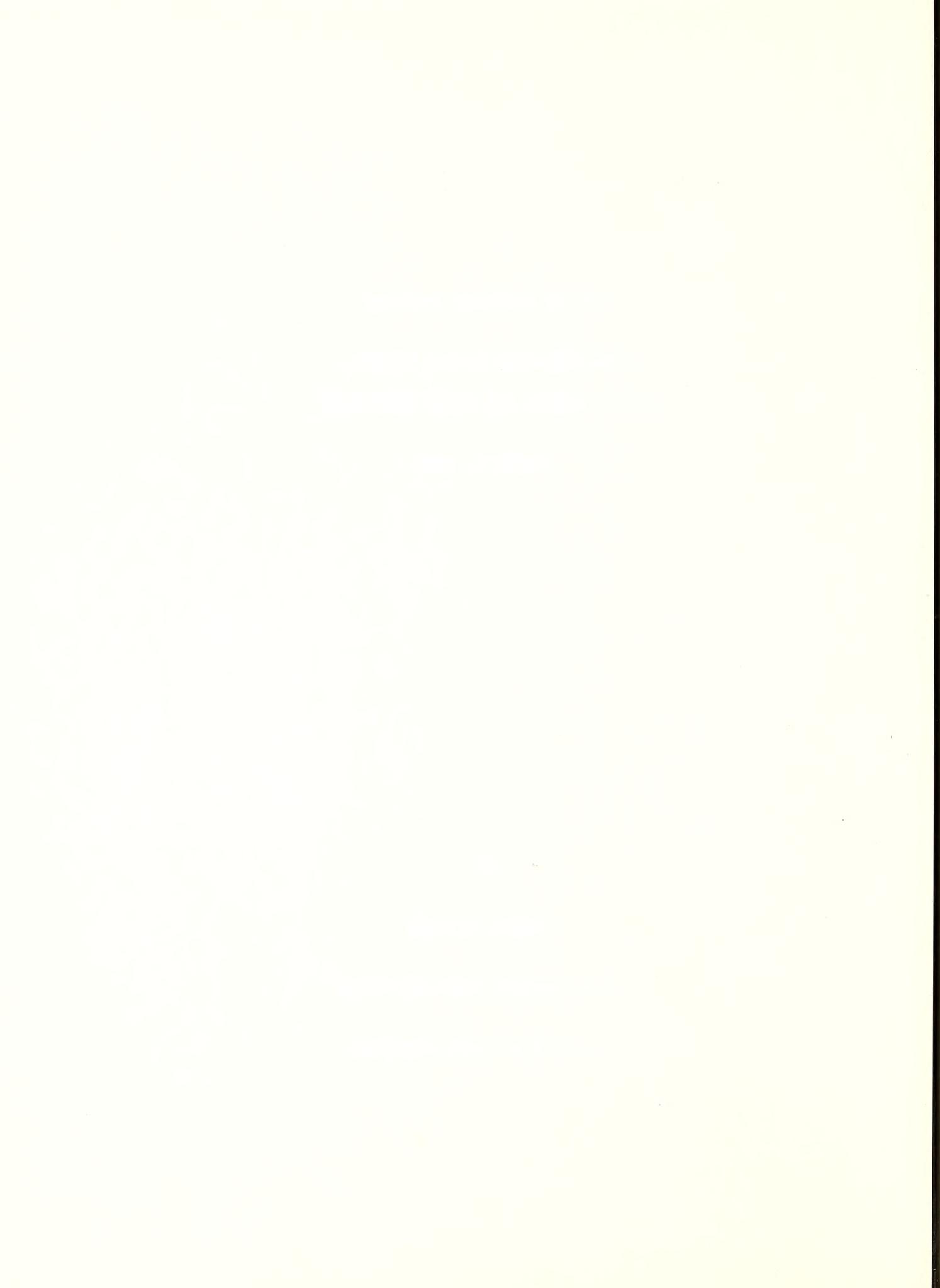
MARCH 2, 1982

BY

MICHAEL FREEMAN

ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE

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I hereby release all right, title, or interest in and to all of my tape-recorded memoirs to the Mississippi Valley Archives of the John Willard Brister Library of Memphis State University and declare that they may be used without any restriction whatsoever and may be copyrighted and published by the said Archives, which also may assign said copyright and publication rights to serious research scholars.

PLACE

7781 Olds Avenue Memphis, Tenn.

DATE

3/21/82

Adolph Fisher  
(INTERVIEWEE)  
(Adolph Fisher)

Mike Freeman  
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives  
of the John Willard Brister Library  
of Memphis State University)

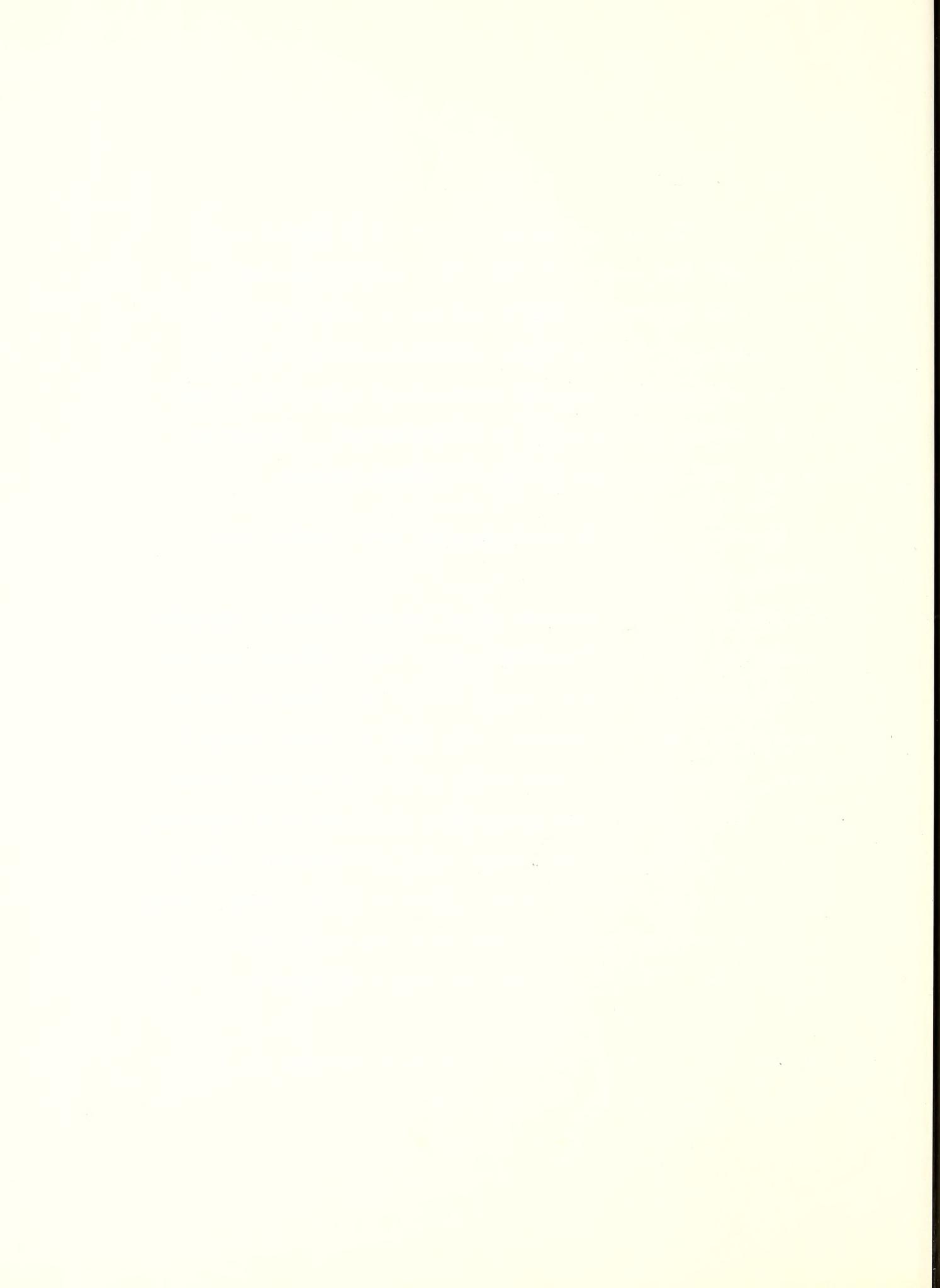


THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "THE LIFE OF CLARENCE SAUNDERS." THE TOPIC IS AN INTERVIEW WITH ADOLPH FISHER, LEOLA FISHER, AND LILLY LOCKRIDGE. ALSO IN THIS INTERVIEW IS INFORMATION ON THE GROCERY BUSINESS PLUS ANECDOTAL STORIES ABOUT MEMPHIS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY MIKE FREEMAN. THE DATE IS MARCH 2, 1982. THE PLACE IS 4786 OLDS AVENUE, MEMPHIS.

Mr. Freeman: Tell me something about Matt Monaghan, that grocery store.

Mr. Fisher: Matt Monaghan was on the west corner of the alley between Main and Front (70-72 Jefferson). The store was first run by Matt Monaghan Sr. Later, around 1898 or 1900, Matt Jr. and Ed Monaghan took over the business. They asked my father, Adolph E. Fisher, to open and run a meat market in conjunction with the grocery. About 1925-26, Poppa moved across the street to 81 Jefferson, next door to the first Piggly Wiggly store (79 Jefferson). For a few years he ran it along with Bruce Fiske as Fisher & Fiske. After a few years, Poppa bought out Fiske and it (the store) became A. E. Fisher & Son. After Poppa's death in 1940, I continued to run the market until July 1953.

Mr. Freeman: So you were on Jefferson at the same time Piggly Wiggly started? You were across the street.



Mr. Fisher: Well, it was across the street.

Mr. Freeman: Do you remember when that store opened?

(September 1916)

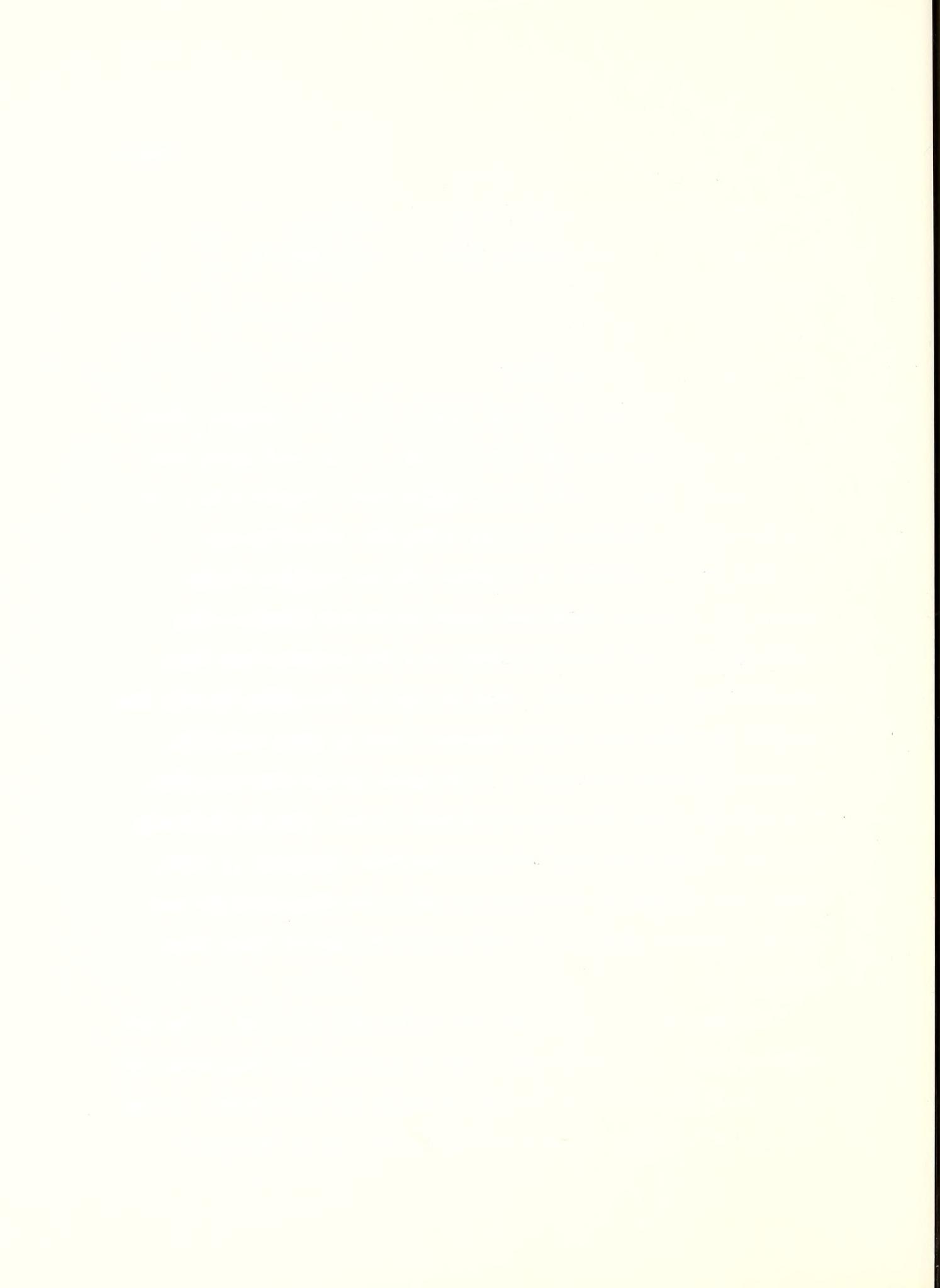
Mr. Fisher: Oh, yes.

Mr. Freeman: What happened?

Mr. Fisher: Well, it created quite a bit of excitement. There had never been a self-service store before. People were going over to see what it was. It (the Piggly Wiggly store) went over big. It grew fast and he (Clarence Saunders) moved out to the suburbs.

That was the downfall of Monaghan, the self-service stores opening up. Monaghan should have moved out to the suburbs. One reason why they didn't move was they had a big business down there supplying boats on the river. They had quite a few contracts with the Corps of Engineers over in West Memphis. Back in those days they (grocers) worked on contracts... (with) boats up and down the river. We would have a contract with Bohlen-Huse Ice Co. Back in those days they used ice on those boats (for refrigeration purposes)... When boats landed in Memphis--this was the last place they could get ice till New Orleans. They had to load up here for ice to carry their food.

Clarence Saunders really started the downfall of a lot of the old grocery stores. Years back there used to be quite a few big stores up-town. There was a store by the name of Bacigalupo and Bartel. It was a fancy store. There was another store by the name of Baltimore,



Knowlton & Lake... ; Wells & Booth was on Main Street...; Arthur Seessel was on Second Street across from Court Square.

Most people, when they bought meat and groceries, came to town (downtown). Of course, there was a lot of delivery business in those days. Monaghan, at one time, had three deliveries a day (to customers' homes); morning delivery, noon delivery, and evening delivery. See, they didn't have refrigeration we have now. They (also) supplied a lot of restaurants.

I remember when I was a kid, the circuses came to town. Used to have the circus down on the riverfront. That's a little before my time, too (laughs). Monaghan sold them groceries and meat. I used to go with my daddy down to the packing house and they would buy whole hindquarters and other stuff to feed the animals. Back in those days, wholesalers could not sell like they do now.

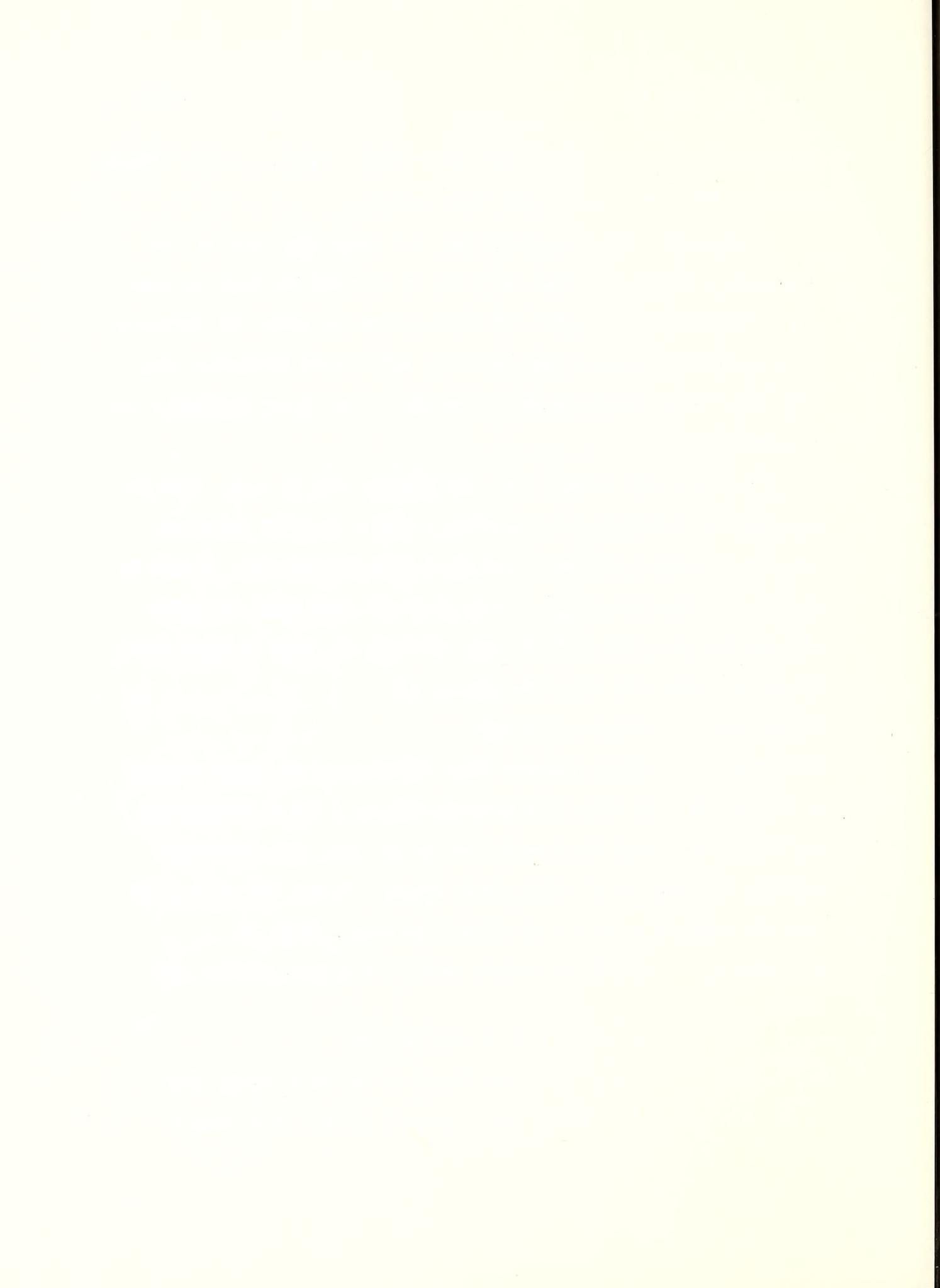
Mr. Freeman: What do you mean?

Mr. Fisher: Today salesmen (from wholesalers) go around selling to restaurants. In those days Monaghan sold to a lot of restaurants and to the jail. Sold for a good while to the zoo. The wholesaler couldn't butt in. If you (the retail grocer) catches them selling to somebody else you would squawk and make them quit doing it.

Mr. Freeman: So the wholesaler couldn't sell to a regular customer?

Mr. Fisher: He had to sell to the retailer.

Mr. Freeman: I have read some things on the first store, some of his ads. But I have never seen a picture (of the first store).



Can you tell me what it was like? Was there a big crowd (of shoppers) out in the street?

Mr. Fisher: The Piggly Wiggly store? I wouldn't say it was an enormous crowd. People were going and coming out of curiosity. It was a good start because he went on from there to make two or three fortunes, only to blow it all on Wall Street.

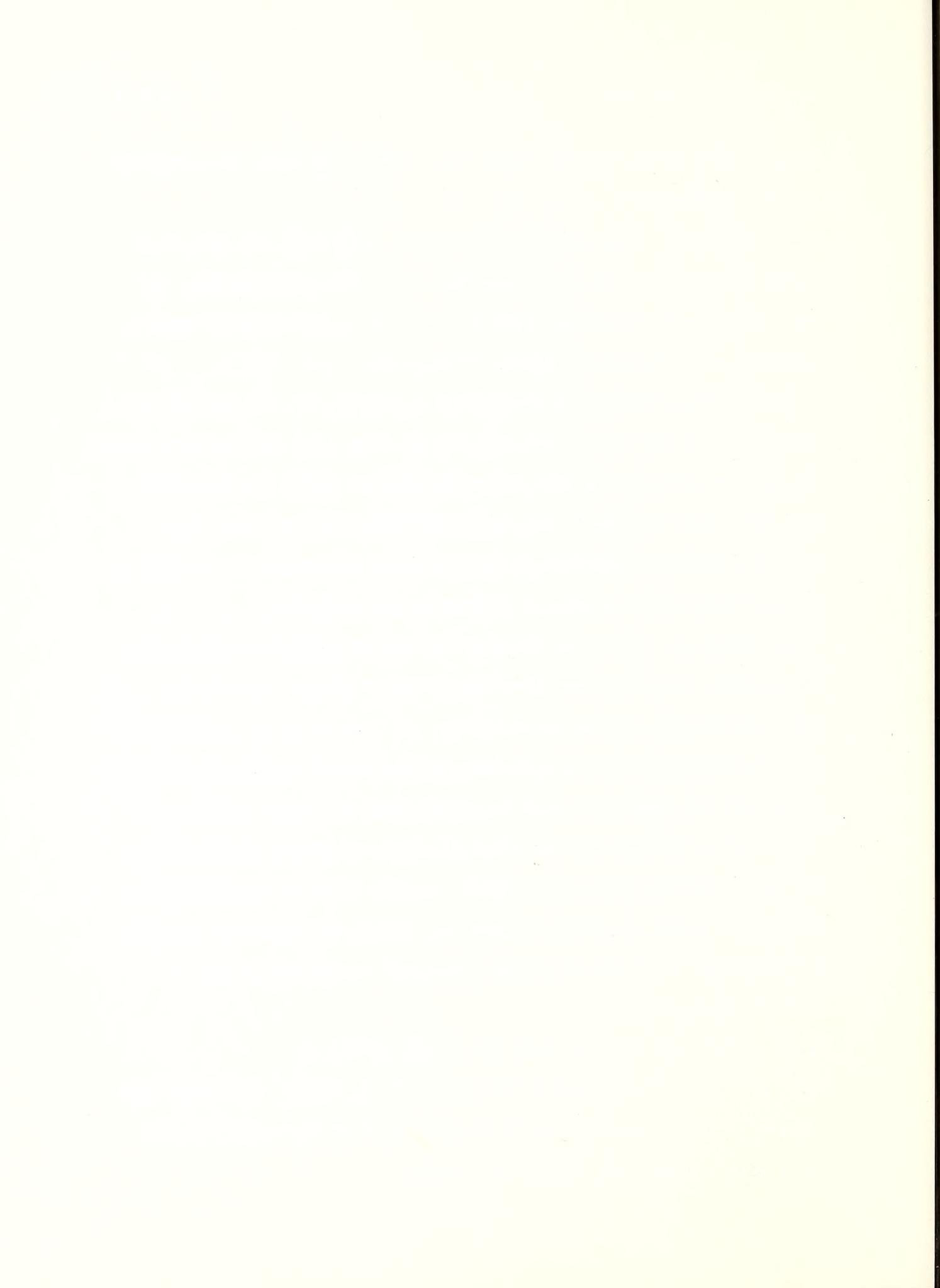
No telling how much that football team cost him. He had all the top players of the country playing for him--the Clarence Saunders Tigers. Who was the team, was it the Green Bay Packers? They (the Packers) came down here to play an exhibition game with them and they (the Clarence Saunders Tigers) beat the Packers... They used to play out at Hodges Field. That was out at Jefferson and Bellevue.

Mr. Freeman: So he had enough money to own a pro football team?

Mr. Fisher: Yes, that cost him plenty of money. Then he had that Pink Palace. That cost him money. We used to go out there when he was building that. He had a swimming pool; he used to let the public go out to it. We used to go swimming quite often at night. That was before it (Pink Palace) was completed altogether. But it got messed up, oh, there were too many people coming (to the pool) and they spoiled a good thing (laughs). Saunders must have been a fine man, for he did a lot of things for a lot of people. Eva used to talk about him, about how good he was.

Mr. Freeman: Did you ever talk to him personally?

Mr. Fisher: Not anymore than hello, or something. My daddy knew him pretty well. Saunders was a salesman (before Piggly Wiggly) and years back, he probably called on Monaghan.



Mr. Freeman: So he called on your dad more than he called on you?

Mr. Fisher: He didn't really call on my dad either; of course, he (A. E. Fisher Sr.) was associated with Monaghan.

Mr. Freeman: Did you ever go into the Piggly Wiggly Store?

Mr. Fisher: Oh yes. I was nosey, too (laughs). I have been in a lot of his stores. When he had that Keedoozle business, you know that push-button store. That created a lot of excitement. (late 1930's)

They say he was crazy like a fox.

Mr. Freeman: What was so different about his store, the Piggly Wiggly?

Mr. Fisher: They had never had self-service stores before. When you went into a grocery store (before Piggly Wiggly), the clerk would wait on you, like in a drug store, he would get your packages. That (the Piggly Wiggly) was the first store where you went around with a basket or cart, picked out your groceries, then checked them out. There had never been anything like it before.

Miss Fisher: They used those wicker baskets at first.

Mr. Freeman: So he did away with salesclerks?

Mr. Fisher: Sure did. He still had to hire employees, but not as many as before.

Mr. Freeman: So he was able to do business a little cheaper than anybody else?

Mr. Fisher: Well, on that account, yes. He could sell groceries at a cheaper price by eliminating some of the overhead.



Mr. Freeman: Did you have problems with overhead when you ran your business?

Mr. Fisher: Well, not necessarily so. Of course, butchers got a fair price. If you wanted a first-class place, you had to pay butchers union wages. Then, too, our store was more personally operated; we didn't have but one or two (employees). In the olden days, when Poppa was connected with Monaghan, they used to have, I think, three or four butchers on each side of the cash register, wasn't it (loud voice)?

Mrs. Lockridge: There were three butchers on each side.

Mr. Fisher: There were six butchers working all the time. Back in those days you had to get up early to get your stock cut up. You didn't have electricity to do the work for you; everything was done by hand. You had a delivery business to get going. It took time... orders would come in, you would have to get them up (prepared) and get them out.

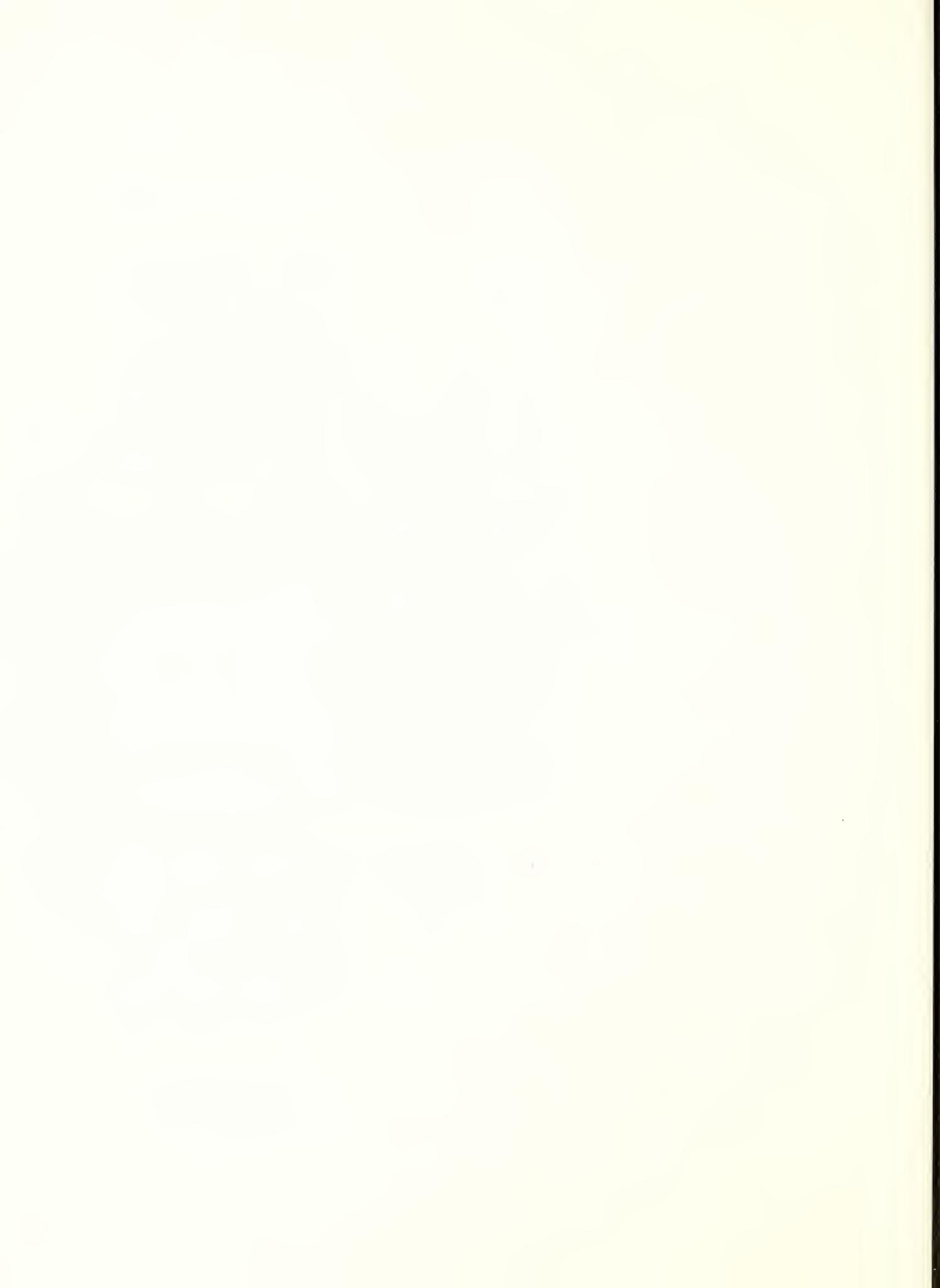
He (Saunders) eliminated all that rushing around.

Mr. Freeman: Tell me again, you actually lived, you were born above the store.

Mr. Fisher: No, see the store was right on the corner of the alley (72 Jefferson)... we then moved the shop to 81 Jefferson. Well, I was born just say, catty-corner across the street above a barber shop. There was a barber shop there and we lived above the barber shop (loud voice).

Mrs. Lockridge: Yes.

Miss Fisher: Lilly and Buddy were born at Court and Main, where Gerber's was (located) later. Then they moved over to Jefferson, in



the middle of the block, between Front and Main. Adolph and Charley (Charles Fisher Sr.) were born there. I was born after they moved out to North Memphis, out on Tully Street. They thought they were moving way out (of the city) when it was just two miles. In those days it seemed way out.

Mr. Fisher: Well, it was at the end of the streetcar line, right around our house.

Mr. Freeman: It's hard for me to understand that people lived downtown.

Mr. Fisher: It is hard to imagine now. Almost everyone who had a business uptown, lived uptown. Anybody who had a horse and buggy in those days, well, you were like a Cadillac man today (laughs). Everyone rode the streetcar for a nickel.

Mr. Freeman: So you really didn't know Saunders personally. It was sort of a business relationship?

Mr. Fisher: Well, we heard a lot about him, through Eva. She thought a lot about him.

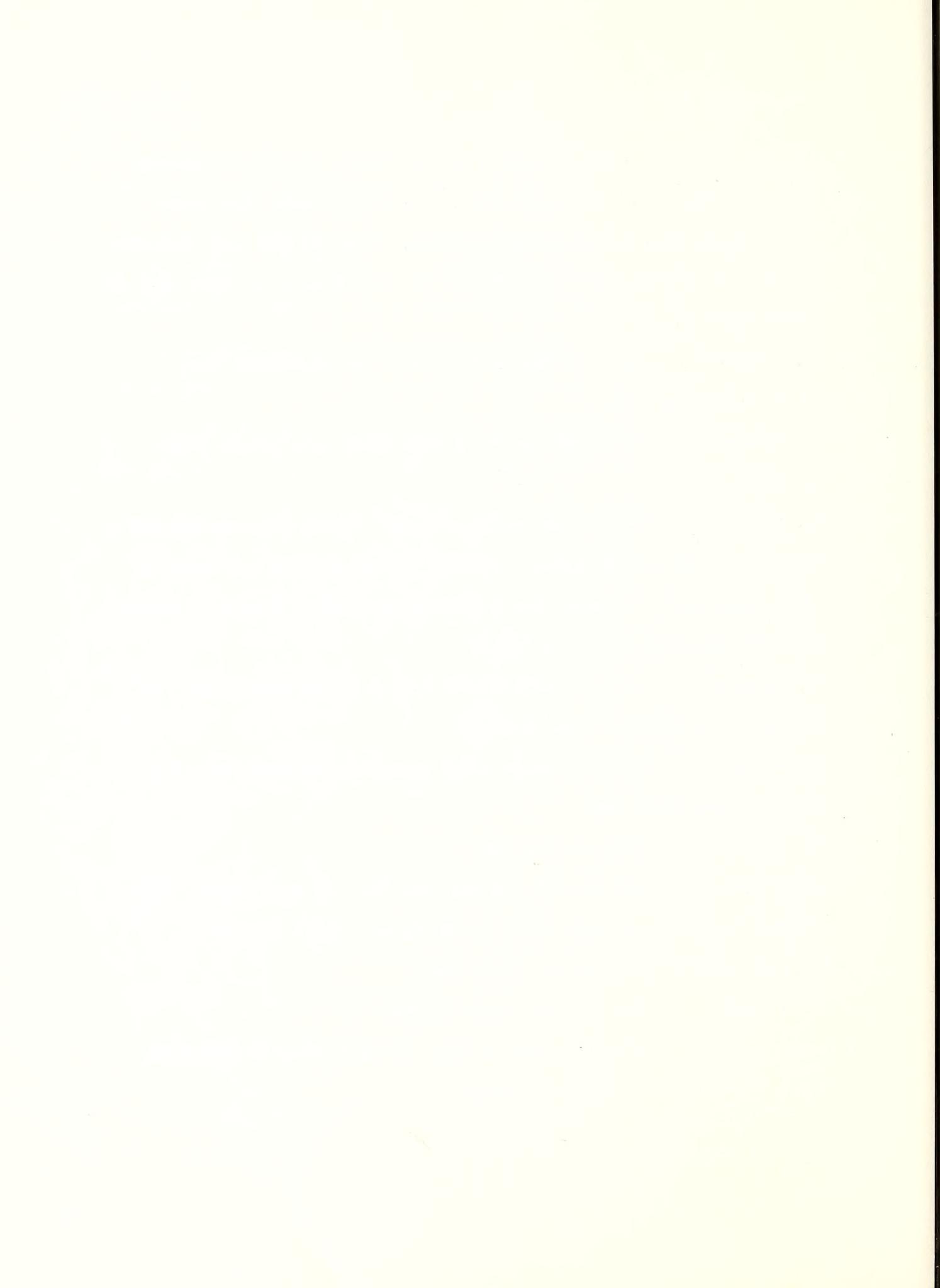
Mr. Freeman: What was her job?

Miss Fisher: She was his personal secretary to start with. Then she was his office manager while he had Piggly Wiggly stores.

Mrs. Lockridge: She was his right hand.

Mr. Freeman: Was she your sister-in-law?

Miss Fisher: Lilly's sister-in-law. Lilly's name is Lockridge. Eva's name was Eva Lockridge Johnson.



Mr. Freeman: How long did she work for Clarence Saunders?

Mrs. Lockridge: Oh, I couldn't tell you. She worked there for quite a number of years.

Mr. Freeman: Did she work for him when he started Piggly Wiggly?

Mrs. Lockridge: I think she did. She was with him during most of his years in the business.

Miss Fisher: Not when he started Keedoozle. She quit and had gone to something else.

Mr. Freeman: Did she know him personally? Did they socialize together?

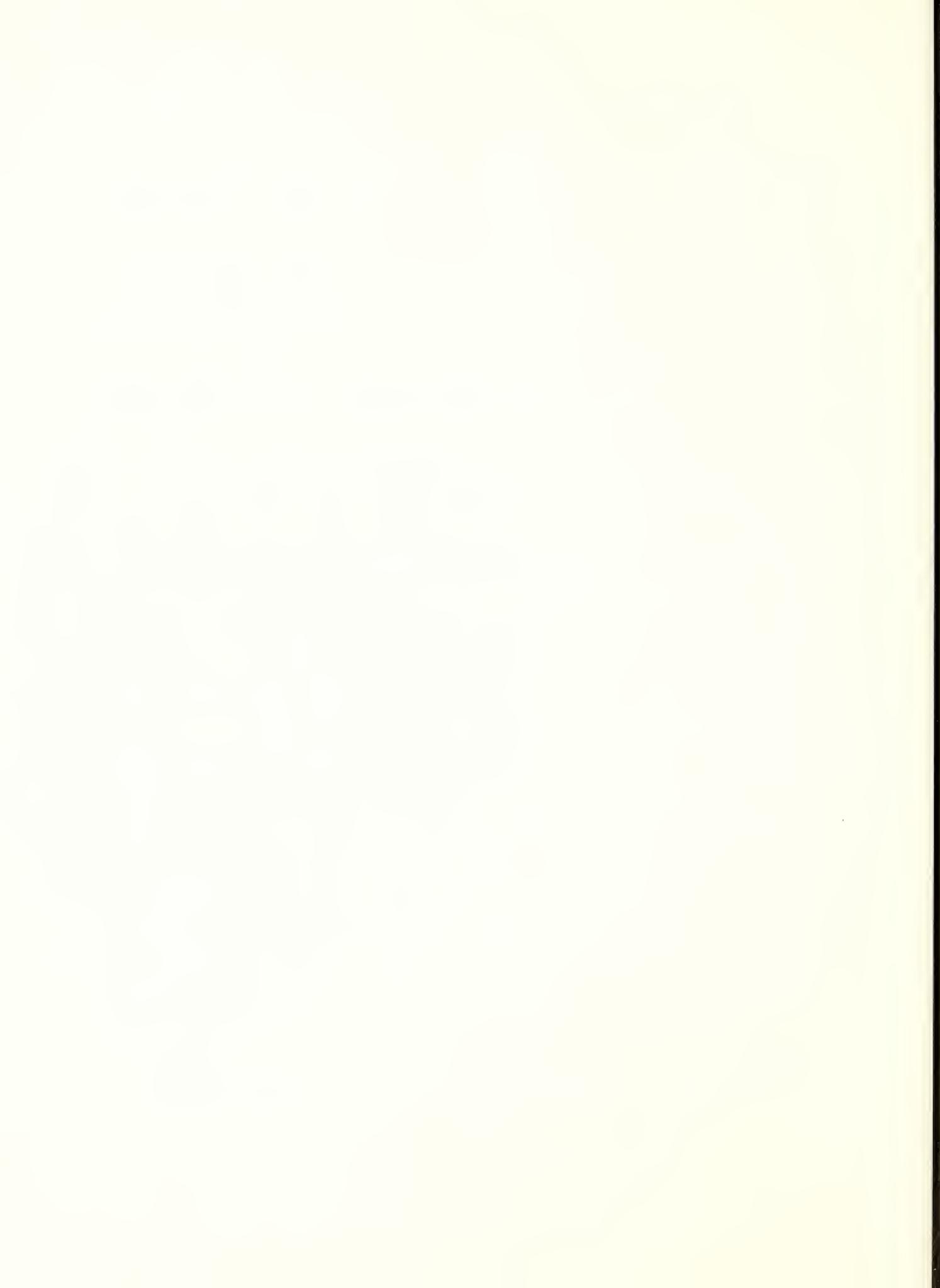
Mrs. Lockridge: I think they did. She knew the famaily--the boys (Clarence Jr. and Lee Saunders).

Miss Fisher: The one boy--named Clay, wasn't he...

Mr. Fisher: He was the one who flew the plane all the time. He would fly under the bridge (laughs). He was kind of wild.

Miss Fisher: Saunders, I think after he built the Pink Palace and lost it, he built that home way out where Poplar and Park Avenue meet (the home, now called Licherman park, is at Quince and Ridgeway). I don't know if he lost it or sold it, but later they called it Lake Forrest. We used to go out there to picnic--they had picnic grounds... and (Lilly interjects) swimming pool. We used to picnic and swim; it was open to the public. I think Bill Terry later bought that--the baseball star.

Mr. Fisher: He was manager of the (New York) Giants, you know.



Mr. Freeman: You don't recall any stories about Clarence Saunders, any funny things he did?

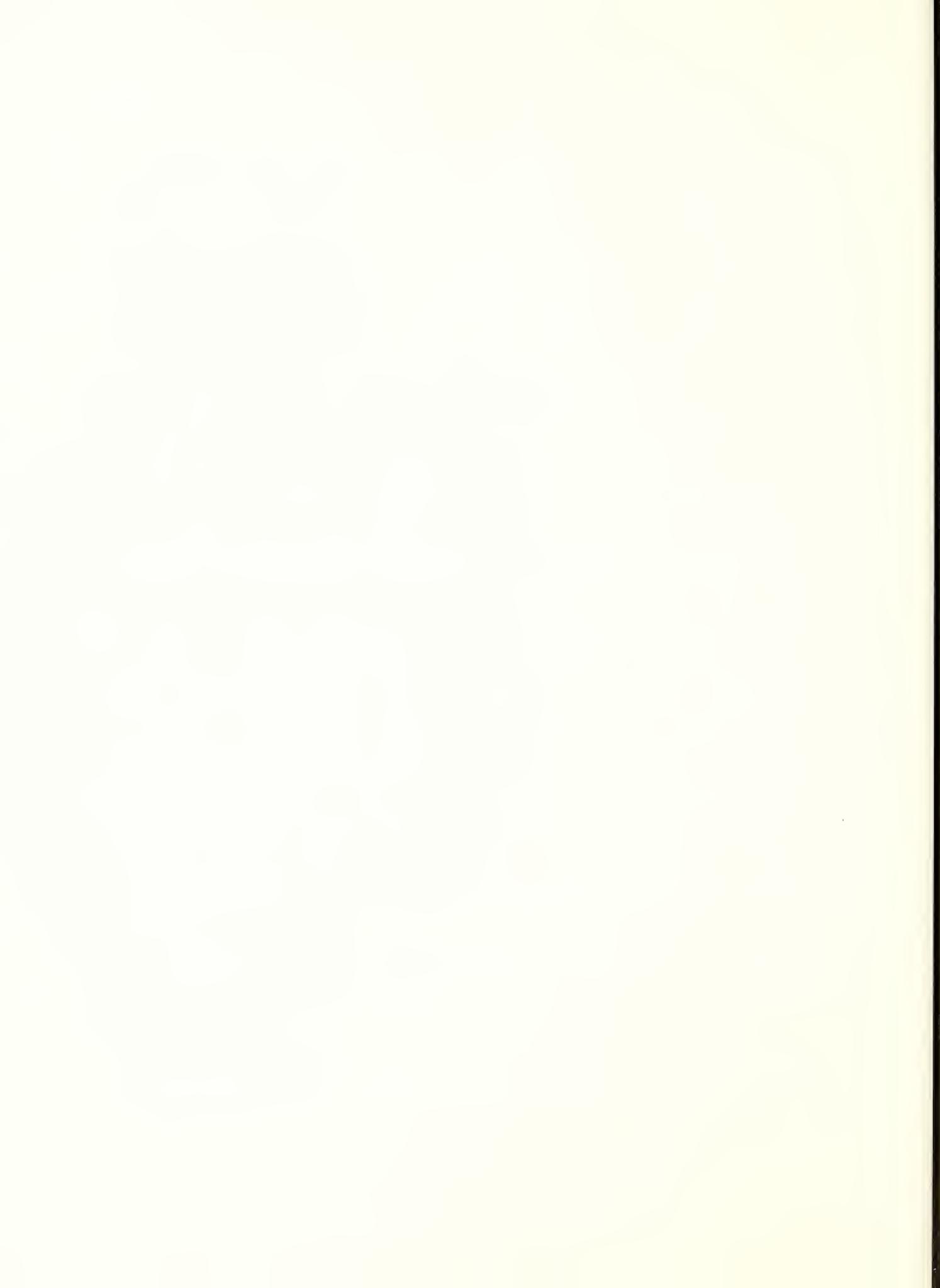
Miss Fisher: Well, I'll tell you one. When he was working on that Keedoozle, it was out there on Union Avenue; I don't remember just where. We, Eva and her husband, Lilly and her husband, and I were out riding. We rode out there and saw the lights on and stopped. We went in and he showed us all around--how it was going to work. He took us upstairs. When you pushed a button the food--a can of pears, or whatever, falls into your basket, goes all around, and falls down a chute to your checker. You didn't have to touch any of the food yourself, just push the button for whatever you wanted and it slid down that chute to the checker.

We were there just joking around and he said to me, "Get in there and slide down" (laughs). I said, "No, I'm not going to do it, but if you will, I will." So he got into the chute (laughter)... and slid down to the main floor. And then I wouldn't do it (more laughter). He got after me because I said I'd do it and wouldn't. He was very friendly.

Mr. Fisher: He had many friends and some enemies, too; he was the cause of a lot of people going out of business with his self-service stores.

Miss Fisher: A lot of independent grocers went out of business because of his cheaper prices.

After he came out with Piggly Wiggly and lost them, he came out with Clarence Saunders Sole Owner Of My Name stores, isn't that what he called them?



Mr. Freeman: What were they like?

Mr. Fisher: About the same.

Miss Fisher: They were supermarkets with self-service--a little larger than the grocery stores before.

Mr. Freeman: Did he ever talk to you about his inventions besides the Keedoozle... about his patents?

Miss Fisher: We never talked about that much. That's the only time I ever talked to him was that night at the Keedoozle.

Mr. Fisher: Of course, everybody knew Saunders back in his hey-day (laughs).

Miss Fisher: He was like Mr. Crump. Everybody knew Mr. Crump.

Mr. Fisher: Ah, Mr. Crump was a man who spoke to you whether he knew you or not. I never will forget one time he came by the store. He used to go up to the King Cotton (69 Jefferson), it was close to election time and they meet up there around noon and then eat lunch. He was going by with one of the politicians; whenever he went by the store, he would pull open the door and holler at my daddy. He called my daddy "red"; that day he passed by and didn't step in. Daddy said to me, "What's the matter with Crump? He didn't say hello this morning." Evidently, he must have thought about it, he must have got as far as the alley, came back and hollered in (laughs).

Miss Fisher: He would ask our brother Charley, Charley worked for him, "Go out and get the car. I want to look at something." Charley was a bookkeeper at Crump's and he would take him away from his job to to ride around and see what was going on, or walk down the street.



You were going to tell him about the Weakley Hotel (83 Jefferson).

Mr. Fisher: A fella named Jack Clements used to run a grocery store on North Main--him and his brother. Their business consisted of regular customers. A lot of country folk came in on weekends to buy groceries, and they used to pay when the crops came in. In later years, he bought the Weakley Hotel, which was right over our business, and he ran it for quite a while. He did a little bootlegging in there during Prohibition (laughs).

Miss Fisher: The entrance to the hotel was to the right of the butcher shop.

Mr. Freeman: Was it a rowdy hotel?

Mr. Fisher: No, it was ordinary, not a first-class hotel, but an ordinary one.

SIDE TWO

Miss Fisher: Poppa was seven or eight years old when he left Germany with his parents and sister.

Mr. Freeman: When was this?

Miss Fisher: He was born in 1873, so that was probably 1880. They lived in New York for a while, then moved to Morrilton, Arkansas, then to Memphis.

Mr. Fisher: Poppa got a job in Lowenstein's...

Miss Fisher: He was just a young teenager.

Mr. Fisher: as a cash boy for five dollars a week (laughs). They say when he got married he was making fifty dollars a month...

Miss Fisher: Fifty dollars a month working for John Mrrell.



Mr. Fisher: He was a boxman for the John Morrell Packing Company. Back in those days, he used to fuss with people of the packing up North. When the meat came down in boxcars, half of it would be laying on the floor. He said they weren't packing it right. They told him if he was so smart and knew how it was to be done, get on the train and show us how to do it (laughs). And he did, of course, at their expense. He showed them how to load those boxcars so they (the meat) would not fall down. Also, while he was there, he told them to ship the offal of cattle (brains, tongue) down South, saying there was a big business for that there.

Miss Fisher: Right after that he went in business with Monaghan.

Mr. Fisher: Another thing we used to do years back, Poppa and Monaghan supplied the stables at Montgomery Park, out there where the Fairgrounds and Libertyland is now, which was horse racing. Back then, they didn't race year-round. They wintered the horses and trained them at (Montgomery Park). They used to get a lot of vegetables shipped up from New Orleans, every once in a while a tote sack of crawfish, or two or three barrels of oysters complimentary. They would send it out to the race track on Sundays, and they would sit around, eat that stuff, talk and drink beer, and let us kids ride the horses.

Miss Fisher: Tell him about Driving Park. (A race track for trotters)

Mr. Fisher: We used to live on Park Street, the first street east of Thomas. Park Street ran up to the Driving Park, where Lazarus Scrap Metal and Firestone are today. They had a mile track, an inside track, and an outside track that must have been a mile and a half. He had a grandstand... he had trapshooting. We used to run around at the Driving Park



Zanones ran a hotel across the street (Thomas) from the park. They would give us our lunch after we would work putting clay pigeons in the slots and pulling the trigger they flew out for the shooter. During World War I, they trained airmen at Driving Park. We ran a stand for the Zanones. Don't know why they did, but most all airmen bought a piece of Hershey's chocolate.

In the olden days, they had fire engines pulled by horses. You've seen pictures, haven't you? When they would leave the fire station they light the fire under it (the boiler) so when they got to the fire, it would be going for steam. Out in North Memphis, there were a lot of mills--sawmills all over there. One would be on fire almost every Sunday (laughs). They would come with big horses just a galloping, pulling that fire engine. We would run after them. We could keep up with them a little--it's not like it is now with the automobile. I don't know how those horses done as good as they did. They were trained at the station. When they got an alarm, some way or another, the alarm opened the gate and let them (the horses) out and they'd go stand under the harness and the harness would drop on them and they would get away from there in no time.

Miss Fisher: They went to Saint Bridget's School. It was up there on Third and Overton, across from Saint Joseph's hospital.

Mr. Fisher: They had floods there before there was a pumping station. Every spring there was a flood. We couldn't go to school there and they would put us in school up in North Memphis, at Chelsea and Seventh Street. Years ago, there used to be a few cotton warehouses



on Third Street. They have cotton (cotton bales) strung out for three blocks, or more. We used to walk cotton, coming home from school (laughs). We walked on top of cotton.

They used to have open trailers on the back of streetcars in summertime. They would have them running out to Raleigh. Ride a car and pay so much to the National Cemetery. Then you paid extra to ride to Raleigh. That was a big deal on Sundays--to ride the streetcars.

Miss Fisher: Then they were little kids they used to go out to Charley High's farm at Breedlove and Chelsea. Go out to spend the weekend in the country.

Mr. Fisher: He ran a butcher shop, too, didn't he?

Mr. Freeman: Did you ever know Clarence Saunders before Piggly Wiggly? Was he famous back then?

Mr. Fisher: No, he was just an ordinary salesman.

Miss Fisher: He hit on that idea of self-service store and that started things going, didn't it?

Mr. Freeman: No one would have guessed he would do something like that?

Mr. Fisher: He wasn't that pushy type salesman, I don't think.

Miss Fisher: He always had something, when he lost Piggly Wiggly and when he lost the Clarence Saunders (stores), he always was out working on something to bring him back.

Mr. Fisher: When we were little kids the Germans had, what did they call it?



Mrs. Lockridge: Mayfest.

Mr. Fisher: Mayfest every year. A German organization had its annual picnic every year at Jackson Mound Park. Later on, it was at East End Park.

Mrs. Lockridge: They had a Maypole dance with the picnic. Had a big parade and all the kids were in the parade.

Mr. Fisher: That was one of the big deals of the year, that and George Washington's birthday. Elks used to have a big birthday party, a party for the kids in the afternoon and a party for the grownups at night up there where the King Cotton is now. (69 Jefferson)

Miss Fisher: It was a red brick building across the alley (from 79 Jefferson).

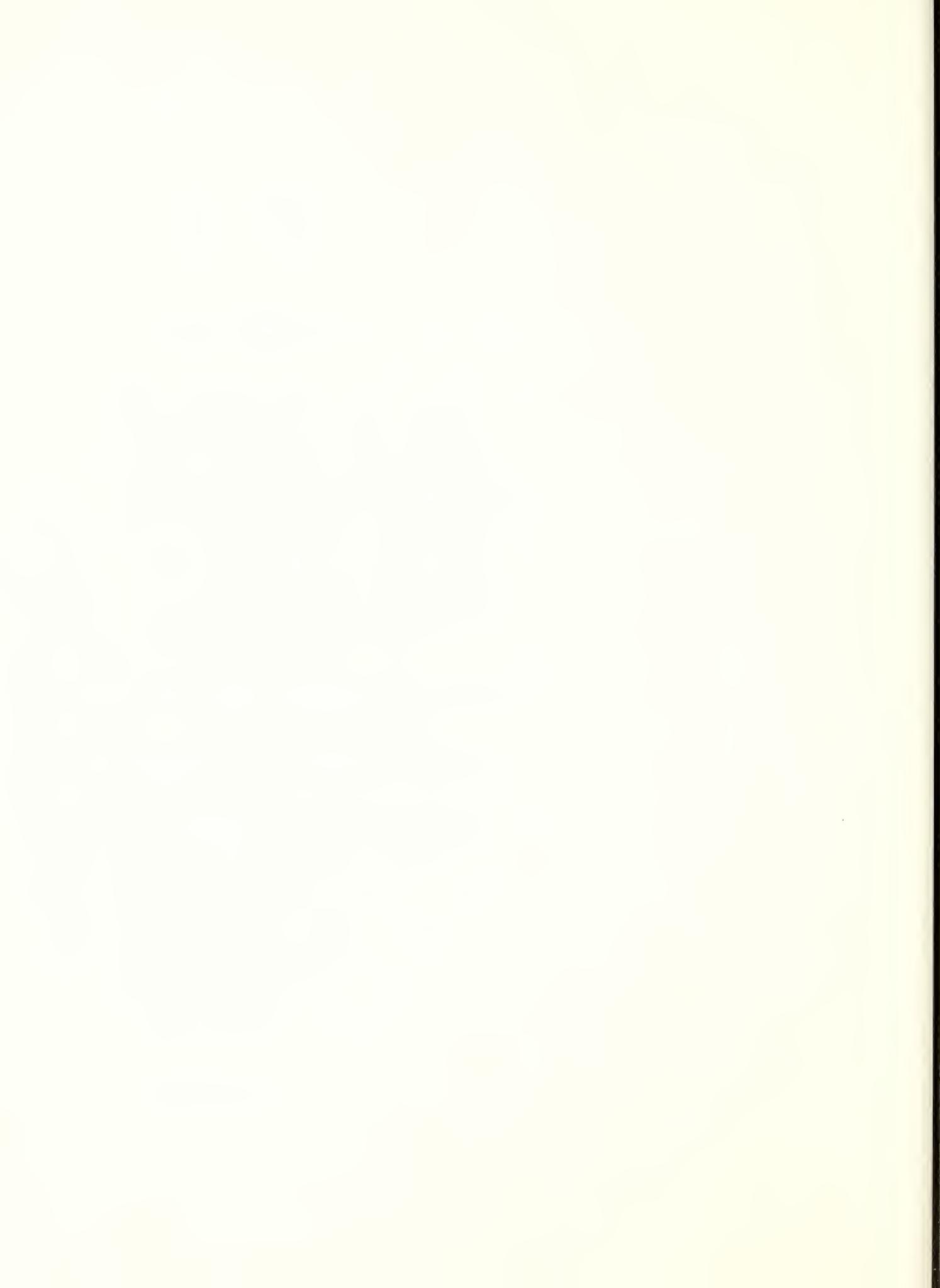
Mr. Freeman: The Elks Club?

Mr. Fisher: It was about four or five stories tall, wasn't it (loud voice)?

Mrs. Lockridge: Oh, it wasn't that tall. I remember when they built it. When they got the foundation built they put boards on top of it and had a big party that spilled out into the street. We were living there then (on Jefferson circa 1904-05). We went out on the balcony of the apartment upstairs and watched them have their street party.

Miss Fisher: Poppa was a life member of the Elks Club. When he worked across the street (72 Jefferson) at Monaghan's, he used to go to the club for a nap every day.

Mr. Fisher: And after the nap, he would go to the barber shop to get a shave and come back to work.



Mrs. Lockridge: We have a mug now he used over there. It's got his name on it.

Mr. Fisher: He didn't use it. The barber did. You had your own mug; he (the barber) had a rack up there. When you came in to get a shave, he would reach in the rack and get your own mug.

When we were kids, Lowenstein's was on the corner (Main and Jefferson). It came back to almost where our shop was (81 Jefferson). I can't remember it, but she remembers when it burnt up (12-25-1903).

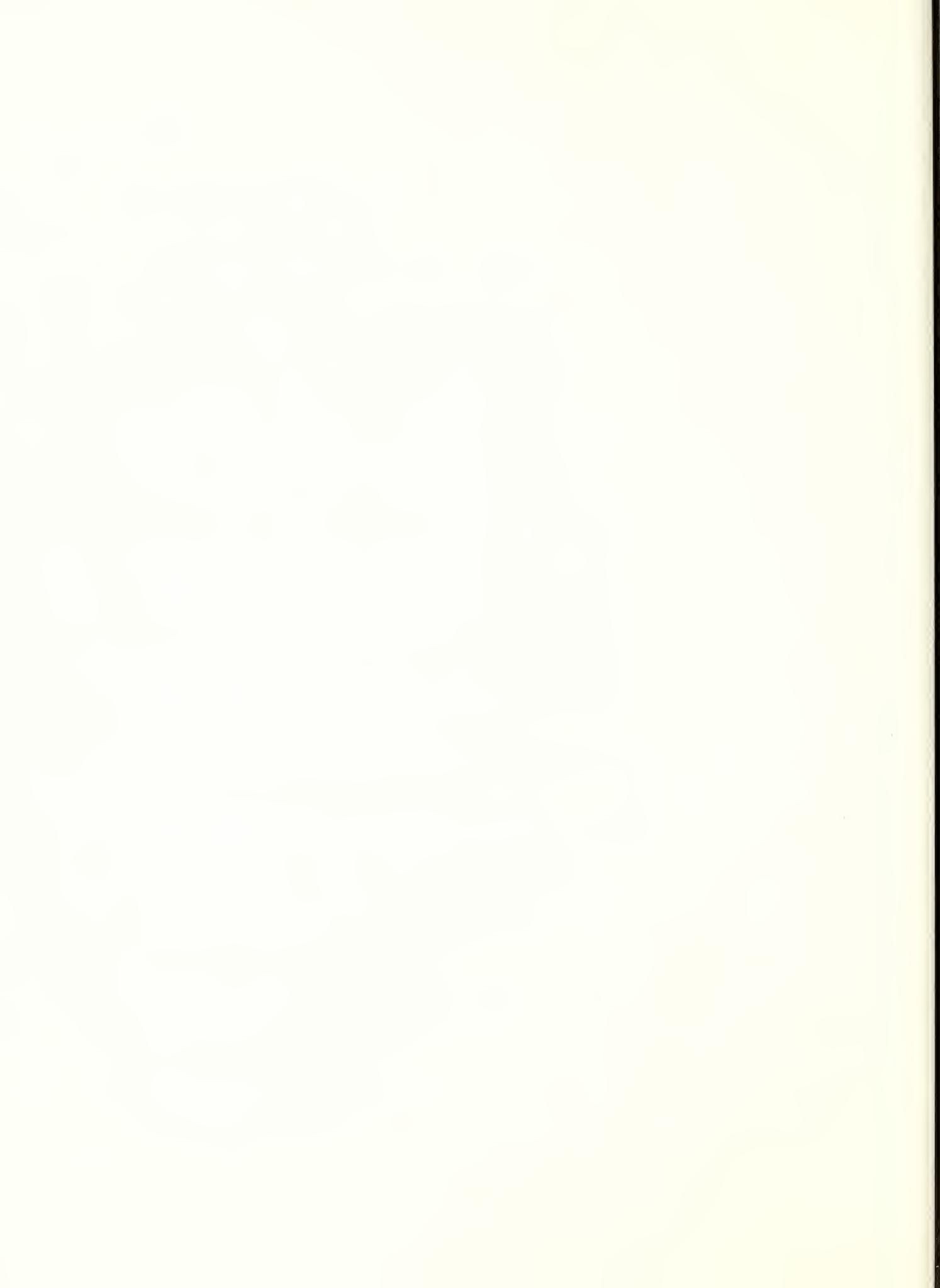
Mrs. Lockridge: I can remember it.

Mr. Fisher: We were living just across the street. Of course, us kids wanted to go outside and get closer to the fire, but Momma and Poppa wouldn't let us out of the house (laughs).

Mrs. Lockridge: In those days, you didn't put up the Christmas tree till that night--kids all thought Santy Claus brought the Christmas tree. They had put up the tree, and had gotten out the toys when this fire broke out.

Lowenstein's made an L-shaped (building)... it faced Main and came around to have a storefront on Jefferson, too. That burned all up that year. Then Lowenstein's rebuilt on the corner of Court and Main.

Mr. Fisher: There was a fella, I don't know his real name now, but we always called him Kenny Mitchell. He opened up a saloon on the corner of Front and Jefferson, northwest corner. He opened up a saloon with one barrel of whiskey--that's all the money he had. He



made a million dollars. Later, he built a beautiful saloon called the Black Satin... made a fortune off one barrel of whiskey.

Back in those days, the (Wolf) river used to be the main channel (of the Mississippi), all along Jefferson, Poplar--didn't have Mud Island then. All the boats used to land there. I can remember when cotton used to be all over the riverfront--on those cobblestones. I made many a trip in bad weather going to the boats, to supply the boats... The Stewards get of the boat up the river and came down and buy everything. Whatever they wanted was on a list--whether it was sheets, food, etc. They gave us the order and when the boat got here all they had to do was pick it up.

I used to walk down the corner of Main and Jefferson and know everybody that went by.

When we were kids we used to get a quarter or fifty cents on Sunday to see the picture show. We bought a sack of candy when we went in and a soda afterwards. If we ran out of money, we walked home (laughs).

(The interviewer failed to tape all this story about their two favorite police officers.)

... Somebody called up to report a dead horse on Pi~~am~~ingo. They (Scott and Ledbetter) were sent to investigate it; then, they had to write it up, but neither one knew how to spell Piamingo (laughs). So they took the horse and drug him over to Madison (laughs). They knew how to spell Madison.



Mrs. Lockridge: They were a regular comedy team.

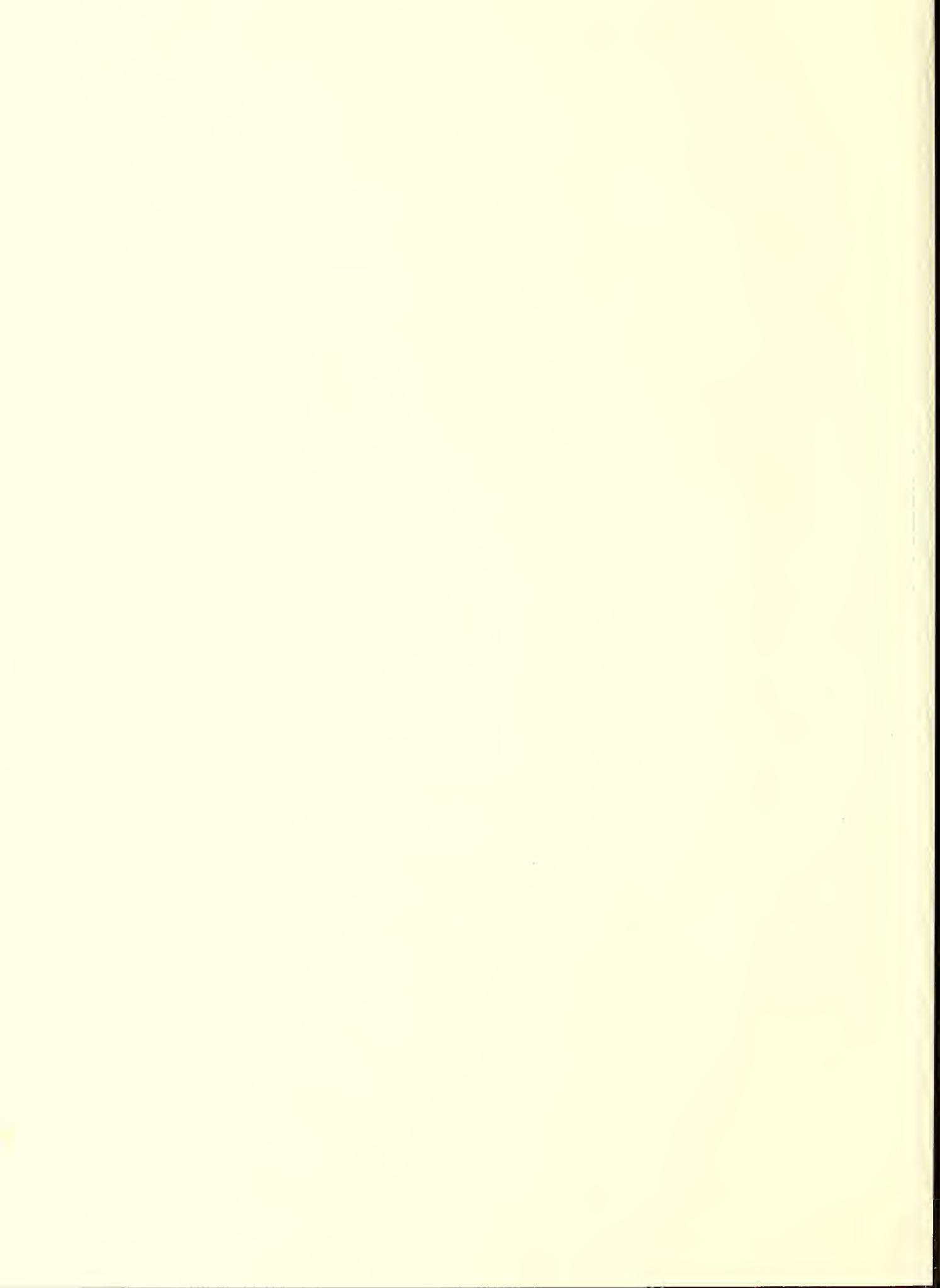
Mr. Fisher: When they were on their beat, Ledbetter would be as far as that chair and Scott would be behind him. Scott was a little heavier, but they bossed things. Didn't have any trouble. I feel sorry for those (winos)... years back during Prohibition, they used to call them bay rum hounds. They used to be down on the riverfront. They buy this bay rum in the 10-cents store--Woolworth's. They (Scott & Ledbetter) would be watching them and, when they came out and came up around Jefferson Street, they wouldn't ask them for it, but would take their clubs and bash the bottle in their back pockets.

To tell the truth, I can't realize how old we are getting. Lilly's 85, I will be 82 in July. I can realize where all that time is gone.

Mrs. Lockridge: Things didn't change so fast as they do now.







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